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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9565
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT SHUTS DOWN FRENCH RADIO FREQUENCY
BUNIA; LARGEST POPULATION CENTERS NOT AFFECTED

REF: KINSHASA 426

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Making good on previous threats, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (GDRC) shut down one of six frequencies allocated to Radio France Internationale (RFI) on May 5. Singling out an RFI reporter for criticism, the Government alleged that RFI is fomenting "destabilization" and seeking to "balkanize" the Congo. A government spokesman announced that more frequencies would be affected if RFI continued to report what GDRC considers "disinformation" harmful to national security. While one RFI frequency has been shut down, the other five, including those in major population centers, continue to broadcast. The action may be related to an ongoing feud with an RFI reporter who was expelled in 2006 but who continues to file reports from outside the country. An affront to freedom of the press, the action, however, does not impact the vast majority of the DRC's radio audience. End summary.

¶2. (U) On May 5 Communications and Media Affairs Minister Lambert Mende sent a communique to Kinshasa media organizations announcing that the Government had shut down one of the six frequencies allocated to RFI, thereby preventing the population of Bunia, in the far-away Lake Albert district of Orientale province, from receiving broadcasts by the French-government owned worldwide radio service. Mende claimed that the work of RFI reporter Ghislaine Dupont was disrupting the Goma peace process by pitting different communities against each other. While claiming that the government is tolerant of criticism, Mende stressed that DRC authorities will nonetheless not compromise on issues of national security. According to Mende's communique, the shutting down of this frequency was in response to previous efforts by the GDRC to convince RFI to "normalize" its coverage of DRC news stories.

¶3. (U) The same day the RFI frequency was shut down, non-governmental organization "Journalistes en Danger" (JED - Journalists in Danger) issued a statement asserting that the Government's decision would damage the DRC's image as a democratizing country. JED Secretary-General Tshivis Tshivuadi said that the Government's claims do not justify its actions, noting that the DRC authorities give the impression that they only protect freedom of the press when coverage is favorable. According to Tshivuadi, the government's action was a violation of the democratic values GRDC claims to support.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: It is not clear who ordered the punitive action against RFI. It may be related to the government's expulsion of Dupont in 2006 (reftel) over criticisms of the Kabila regime. The combative RFI reporter created enemies at that time and many of them are not willing to let bygones be bygones. Although the action is an affront to freedom of the press, its practical impact is not great. Bunia, the capital of the outlying Ituri district is 1,150 miles from Kinshasa while only 25 miles from the border with Uganda. While the city boasts a population of slightly more than 100,000, most residents do not speak French and thus would not listen to RFI. RFI audiences in the DRC's major population centers are not

affected by the government's action. Furthermore, reception of RFI broadcasts by the DRC's most important audience, listeners in the capital city of Kinshasa (with perhaps as many as 7 million inhabitants), cannot be disrupted without the concurrence of authorities in the neighboring Republic of the Congo. We will provide updates and additional information as developments warrant. End comment.
GARVELINK